

SAILORS' SUPERSTITIONS

Curious Beliefs of Those Who Go Down to the Sea in Ships.

The Specter Who Aided Jack to Reef the Sails When a Blow Came.

Sailors Like to Have Rats Aboard Ship—Weddings at Sea Not Bad.

Superstitions! Of course sailors are superstitious. Why should they be, when everything in their lives depends on circumstances. The vessel which they ship in is an accident. The length of a passage to a foreign port depends on circumstances over which they have no control, the wind, the weather and the skill of the skipper, says the Boston Commercial Bulletin. It's all a chance whether they get good grub, poor grub, or no grub at all. It all depends on circumstances whether they'll ever see dry land again after they're once lost sight of. So you can't blame sailors for being superstitious, argued a superannuated son of Neptune, as he sat on the capstan of a wharf, complacently smoking his pipe one sunny day not long since.

"But then again I don't see as they are much more superstitious than lots of old women, and for that matter old men too, living ashore. Why, any one on you can remember how bad the old women would feel to spill salt on the table; how quick they'd chuck it over the left shoulder, or into the fire to break the spell like. Now, when they'd break a looking glass, some one was sure to die outen the family. Let a dog howl under the window, a relative was sure to cross. When I remember, not a dog howl under the window, a relative was sure to cross. When I remember, not a dog howl under the window, a relative was sure to cross."

"I tell you," went on the nautical philosopher, "the heart yarn of the rope of humanity, is mostly made up of superstition, and I don't care who contradicts it, it is so. But I'll agree that them 'as goes down to the sea in ships,' and them 'as goes out to battle, are more given to superstition than them 'as lives quietly at home.'"

"What are some of the principal superstitions to which sailors are given?" asked one of the group of listeners, who was also kicking his heels over the edge of the wharf.

"Well, I could begin now and spin you yarns, all of 'em, but I'll tell you, first, that then you wouldn't 'heerd half of what there is. But I'll tell you one to begin with that happened to me aboard a vessel that I was able to see going out to the East Indies many years ago."

"It was a rousin' good crew of men that shipped on the old hooker, and there were good officers, too, but there was only one thing that put us agin' her and prevented us from makin' the passage out in her. Yes, sir, as soon as she was made hard and fast in the Hoochly river, we 'jumped her,' every one of us, except the captain and officers. And what do you 'pose was the matter?"

"Oh, I don't know. Bad grub, perhaps. 'No. The grub was good enough, but that old craft was hatched. Yes, sir; just as sure as we sit here on the capstan of this wharf, she was hatched."

"A slight ripple of decision went through the attentive audience of the old sailor. 'Laugh if you want to, but it don't alter the case. Now, ye see, it's just this way: I'm going to begin at the very first of my story and work for it. We had first rate weather until we got down pretty near the latitude of Cape of Good Hope. We unbent the light sails and sent the heavy ones aloft in their place, for you see they generally look for nasty weather-doubtful that point. Well, one night she came on to blow."

"The old man sang out 'red tops!' But he didn't until he was obliged to. He seemed to act as if he hated to 'start away' the halcyons; but it had to be done. We let go fore and aft, and the upper tops'lar came down by the run."

"'Lay aloft, and reef' was the next order. But do you know not a man started from deck. All hands were looking aloft at the weather yardarm of the mainmast. 'Well, what did you see?' What did you see?"

"We saw a man settin' there," answered the old sailor solemnly, "and we saw a man settin' there, workin' away just as though he was 'passing the war-rin.'"

"'Who's that?' yellers, yelled the captain, 'what're ye standin' for?'"

"'Who's that on that yard there?' asked my chum (the best man in the ship). 'Get aloft there you d—d fool, and you'll see there ain't nobody there.'"

"'Well, I ain't afeared to go,' answered Bill, jumping into the rigging, and some of the rest of us followed."

"'I was close up to my chum's heels, and I could hear him breathing hard like I did, and I know no matter what it was out there, it wouldn't stop Bill from passin' that ear-rin' and I was bound to help him."

"So up we climbed, and crawled out on the yard, but the further we got out on the less we could see of the ghost, for we knew it must be a ghost. However, when we reached the end of the yard, we saw a man and Bill and I called out that we never had a weather 'ear-rin' haul out so easy in our lives. That's cause there was three on us to work; yes, sir, there was three on us, and that was down on deck, told us afterward that they could see that man a pullin' and a heelpin' on us in a powerful way."

"And that's the way it was; every time that sail was reefed, 'Johnny-come-blow,' we called him that, cause he only came when 'twas blowin' and he wouldn't be put to rest until the mates couldn't get anybody but Bill and me to go out on that yardarm. After awhile we got kinder used to him like, and I come near reefin' 'em overboard one time, when I heerd Bill say."

"'Well, old son, I should think you'd get tired of chasing this ship round jest to help us haul out this 'ear-rin.'"

"After awhile I didn't mind it, and I got so I'd talk to him, too. Course he didn't answer us, but the fellows on deck used to say that they could see him noddin' his head jest as though he could understand us."

"Now, I'll tell you what used to bring him there. Two or three voyages afore we joined the ship, one night when it was blowin' and the mates were tryin' to reef the tops'lar, and it was all on account of the ghost on the tops'lar yard that we left the 'hooker' when she got to Calcutta."

"'Plead! That's a rouser,' exclaimed one of the listeners. 'There! Do you see that big barque towin' to see?' went on the old sailor, taking no notice of the comments of his auditors. 'Do you see that barque?' indicating a lumber laden vessel astern of a tugboat. 'Now, if there was any way to prove it, I'd bet any man a pound of tobacco that she's going to make a quick passage.'"

"How do you make that out, old man?"

"Why, don't you see, she's got a list to starboard—see if the fact wasn't as patent as every one as to himself. 'A list to starboard,' quick passage; list to port, long passage. You'll find it so every time."

"No, sir! That ain't superstition; that's a fact. But here's something that sailors used to make fools of themselves over, and for that matter folks ashore, too. That is,

commencing a voyage or any piece of work on a Friday. That still hangs with some men now going. I'll tell you just how it is. In old times may be 'twas bad luck to sail on Friday, but now-a-days it ain't, it's good luck! I've always noticed that when I sailed on a Friday that we had a good passage, and mostly pleasant weather; and ag'in Sunday is an ezamin' good day to sail for a quick passage; if you 's' shore anchor' on that day, every one of you that you have will either begin or be blowing on Sunday."

"How is it about sharks following a vessel? Is it because they expect some human flesh to feed upon?"

"Well, I ain't quite so superstitious as that, but I'll admit that if I see a fellow's fin in our wake, I'd go without my whack of pork for a month to bait a hook to catch him with. But it does seem as if the beggars could smell a feller as was about ready to be sewed up in his blanket."

"I thought they sewed them up in their hammocks."

"Perhaps they do aboard a man-o'-war, but a merchantman ain't got no canvas to waste on the carcass of a dead sailor. No, sir; his old blanket and two or three old shacksles at his feet, just enough to keep him head up, and disconcert the sharks that swaller him, is Jack's coffin."

"To tell you the truth," went on the old sea-dog meditatively, "for now he was thoroughly wound up—it allus seemed to me as if sharks followed in the wake of a vessel to feed on the truck that went over the rail from the cook's galley. For, although there's not much that's fit for a man to eat that is thrown overboard, yet, taking it fore-and-aft, there is considerable stuff goes over the rail. And you know a shark will swallow anything from a man's leg to a soup-and-bully tin."

"Now here's another thing about vessels. You let any litch take place when they're launchin' and that craft won't meet with much luck afterwards. I don't mean pile up on the rocks or get run down right off, but she won't be what her owners expect of her, and that's puttin' it mild. Now, here's a case. There was a pilot boat built a few years ago here, and was sold afterwards to New York pilots. Well, the day she was to be launched a big crowd went down to see her off. Just as they were going to let her slip into the water, the starb'd way floated, and in course they couldn't launch her that tide."

"Now, says I to one of the owners, 'that's bad luck, and you'll never be satisfied with her.' So it turned out, and they sold her as quick as they could."

"How about rats?" called out a street urchin, who was eagerly listening to the sailor.

"Rats? There you are," answered the sailor, without turning his head to see who was his interlocutor. "I don't pretend to be over and above superstitious, but I think if I'd shipped in a house where I was chuckin' away my damage aboard, I should see a good, fat, reliable rat crawlin' ashore on the bowline, I'd fling my bag onto the dock and back out. Not because I'd be afeared that she was going to sink—but yessir, rats are kinder company like. And when you're all alone on the di-gallant-forencle, on the lookout at night, it's kinder pleasant to have the little fellows run around about between your legs and pipe to you; it's sociable, ye know?"

"'Avast, there! Avast, there!' went on the entertainer, who now, looking at the group, as one of them whistled, mockingly: 'This wind break enough to suit any man's purpose, that you need to whistle up more crew?' I remember once, when a boy, when an old mate said to me the first day I put foot aboard a ship. I commenced to whistle as I used to do when I was going to school. He was as good as a man as ever spliced a rope, and said he was to me."

"Stop that whistlin', boy, and remember don't ye ever whistle on board a vessel unless it's a dead calm, and then blow your d—d lungs out—and I never forgot it. You'd never see a sailor whistle unless the wind is mighty light."

"Sey, old man, did you ever see the Flying Dutchman?" asked another questioner, who was looking at the sailor with a look of interest.

"The venerable sailor turned his fishy eyes upon his querist. 'Ay, lad, that I have,' he answered, slowly. 'At least if it wasn't Vanderdecken's ship, it was the devil's. That was once when we were holed in the Indian ocean in a gale of wind. We were a little to the north of the Cape of Good Hope. It was blowing great guns. When all at once we saw a craft coming down across our bow, afore she wind with every stretch of sail set. She was bilin' along like a shot, and she had a queer look to her. There was one fellow on the poop that waved his hat as they went by. I was at the wheel at the time, and the cap'n says: 'That's the Flying Dutchman, for no man but him could show so much sail in this gale of wind even if he was running afore it. And from that time on he was worryin' until he fetched up hard and fast on one of the little islands that make up the coast of Madagascar. And as soon as she struck the old man sung out, 'that's the work of the Flying Dutchman. I knew this craft would never get into port.'"

"But now I'll tell you what's worse than to meet the Flying Dutchman," said the old sailor very impressively, "worse than that, is to meet a vessel, say, worse than to have the mate go over the side."

"What is that? What is that, old man?" was eagerly inquired.

"'A wedding on board ship!' very solemnly. 'A wedding? Why that should be good luck, if such a thing ever occurs on ship board,' said one who had been an attentive listener to the rest of the story. 'Well, there's where you make a mistake, mate, for it ain't. No, sir, it ain't. And I'll tell you why it ain't, and I can prove it too. It wasn't many years ago that I went out in a vessel to Madras, India, and we had aboard quite a number of missionaries. Well, among the lot was one young girl who reckoned kinder strict in her conscience, and she had been there in the county a year or more. 'We'd hardly got our anchor down about seven miles outside of the surf, when the young fellow came alongside in a boat looking after his girl. Then the rest of the missionaries thought it would be a great idea to have them married on board."

"Don't you do it," says the mate to the cap'n. 'If you do, this ship will have bad luck.' But the old man only laughed at the mate, and came pretty near telling him that he was a fool. 'The next day at four bells in the morning watch (10 o'clock), after we fellows had been at work from daylight, scrubbing decks, polishing brass, spreading awnings and bunting, we were mustered aft to witness the ceremony."

"The young folks stood up on the quarter-deck, and one of the missionaries, who was a regular preacher by trade, started to splice 'em. There was a little hitch as to who should give the bride away, and as I was about to volunteer to do the business, the old man stepped up and said he thought he had the most to say as to how things should be done aboard that craft, whether it was tacking ship or running a wedding, so he gave the girl away."

"Well, there was a jolt time that day for us fellows, and the bloke who got married felt so tickled that he wanted to do something grand, so he says to the cap'n: 'What can I do for the boys?' meaning as sailors."

"I think the best thing you can do for the boys is to send a good round of 'grog' for 'em, and I'll tell them lay the rest of the day."

"Now the grog business kinder staggered the person, but being in a heathen land I reckoned kinder strict in his conscience a little, and we had a good bumper apiece to drink the health of the bride in."

"The old sailor laboriously struggled to his feet and started to waddle up the dock. 'Here, here; what befall the vessel on account of the wedding?' was called out in various tones."

"Ah, I'll tell you what became of her. Her boxes are now bleaching on the shores of one of the Canary islands! So take my word for it, and never have a wedding on board a ship."

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THE MARKETS.

STOCKS.
New York, Dec. 7.—Bar silver 55. Copper—Steady. Lake December, 84. Lead—Dull and unchanged; domestic, 12.55. The stock market was quite active by spells this morning, but there was generally a strong tone, and while all the improvement was not retained at the close, a great majority of the list are materially lighter than last evening. Sharp advances were made in many stocks, and sugar shot up to 70 followed by Manitoba, Michigan Central, Chicago & East Illinois preferred and others. Government bonds dull and steady. Petroleum opened firm at 12.85, and closed 12.83. Government bonds, 4s, 117, 45s, 104; Northern Pacific, 25; preferred, 11; Oregon Improvement, 41; Oregon Navigation, 101; Transcontinental, 35; Union Pacific, 65. Money on call at 4.65. Prime mercantile paper, 60/70. Sterling exchange, quiet; steady; sixty-day bills, \$4.50; demand, \$4.54.

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Chicago, Dec. 7.—Cattle—Receipts, 3,000; quiet unchanged; heavy, \$5.65; light, \$5.55; stockers and feeders \$1.50; Texas cattle \$1.50; western ranges \$2.50; 3.25. Hogs—Receipts, 2,000; steady; mixed, \$5.55; heavy, \$5.55; light, \$5.55. Sheep—Receipts, 2,000; steady; natives, \$5.00; 3.10; western, \$5.00; 3.10; Texas, \$5.10.

CHICAGO PRODUCE.
Chicago, Dec. 6, 115 p. m.—Close—Wheat—Easy; Dec. 75; May, 75. Corn—Steady to firm; Dec. 32, May, 33. Oats—Steady; Dec. 20; May, 22. Barley—No trading. Pork—Firm; Jan., \$9.00; May, \$9.75. Lard—Steady; Dec. \$5.25; May, \$5.12.

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